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OBTAINING REPLACEMENT EWES FOR KANSAS

The ewe replacement program started in Kansas as an Extension cooperative project in May 1937, when seven cooperators from two counties placed orders for 682 yearling ewes. This program has been carried on continuously every year since that time, and in 1950, 478 cooperators from 46 counties placed orders for 12,750 ewes. On an average these yearling ewes weigh approximately 80 pounds. They are of good quality Rambouillet breeding and heavy producers of fine wool. The shrinkage during shipment varies considerably, but as a rule it ranges from 10 to 15 pounds. These purchases are made directly from ranches in Texas.

During the 13 years that this program has been carried on, some interesting phases of the work have developed. For example, in 1937, as most of us recall, the farming business in Kansas was not particularly profitable. For that reason many farmers were taking notice that a farm flock of sheep on Kansas farms paid the best dividends on the investment of any of the agricultural programs. After 1937, for 5 years the replacement orders increased until the general decline in sheep numbers all over the United States occurred during the war, when Kansas lost approximately 45 percent of stock ewes and ewe lambs. This general decline continued until 1950 when the U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics showed that the farm flocks were being reduced. It was then considered advisable to continue with the replacement program, even though the decline in numbers throughout the State was going on all the time and the orders for replacements were small and were decreasing. We felt that by all means the program should be kept alive in order to hold our contacts not only in Kansas but also with the ranch owners in Texas. The program now is so well established that many flock owners and would be beginners depend upon this source for replenishing their breeding stock and also for starting new farm flocks. The purchases are made preferably from large ranch owners. Last year 4,750 yearling ewes were purchased from one rancher. In a program of this kind where the satisfaction of many purchasers is very desirable and sometimes quite difficult to obtain, it helps tremendously to deal with persons who are well established. For this reason purchases have been made from the same ranchers many times during the 13 years. This phase of the program of dealing with dependable ranchers who are in the sheep business not as a side line but as a main objective is a great aid in obtaining yearling ewes of good quality that are about as free from external and internal parasites as it is possible for them to be, considering the number of ranches from which the purchases are made. For example--sheep scab is always a possible source of danger, and yet during the 13 years that this program has operated, a total of 120,000 yearling ewes have been purchased without a single case of sheep scab. Since the business is a main source of income for these large ranch owners, it is obvious that their breeding stock is of the best quality. These large ranch owners also carry on a very effective internal parasite program.



The yearling ewes, as a rule, are about 14 to 16 months of age and shorn about 3 to 4 weeks before our purchases are made in May. Since the Texas ranch owners get a high percentage of their income from the first wool crop from these yearlings, they do not offer them for sale until after they are shorn. This Texas practice of making these shorn yearling ewes available in May in considerable volume fits in well with the Kansas program, which is centralized around the June 1 to July 15 mating season and the November and December lambing. This, of course, brings up the all-important phase of a farm flock management program of getting a good percentage of the ewes bred before the middle of July in order to get the lambing program pretty well done from November 1 to December 15. If the flushing of the yearlings is well carried out, approximately 85 percent of them will become settled and lamb in November and the first half of December.

Probably in some instances the thought still prevails that the ewe breeding season is in the fall; however, by carrying on an effective flushing program immediately after these yearlings arrive in Kansas, we have been able to obtain a very good percentage of ewes breeding early and in this way have put the lambing season over into the fall after the flies have disappeared and before cold weather arrives--or from November 1 to December 15. This early lambing can readily be carried on during the life of the ewes. This is a little late in this discussion to make the all-important statement that only the best quality of purebred mutton-type rams should be used.

So here we have the program in a nutshell. The yearling ewes are purchased from ranch owners who are interested in a high quality of wool production. The Kansas farm flock program aims at having a good crop of wool from the ewes, which are to produce top-notch market lambs sired by good mutton type rams, and having these lambs ready for the market before July 1 or before the arrival of hot weather and the usual decline in the market.

We consider the flushing phase of the program to be one of the most important steps and worthy of some repetition and emphasis at this time in our discussion. Upon the arrival of these shipments at the local shipping points in carload lots, which often consist of 10 small orders making up a total of a double-deck load or approximately 300 head, the following points should be carefully considered:

First, get the local stockyards in order for unloading and notice particularly that there is not an excess of vegetation in these yards; because as a rule, these yearlings have been on the road 2 to 5 days and are rather low in resistance, and a filling of green vegetation with plenty of water might result in considerable losses. For this reason the stockyards should be fairly free from weeds and other growth.

Second, a careful count should be made of all deaths and cripples at the time of unloading and reported to the local freight agent.

Third, usually just a gate-cut is the most satisfactory method of making out each man's order.



Fourth, after the yearlings reach their future, they should be placed in a secure lot and fed dry feed, preferably a good proportion of alfalfa hay with plenty of water, and fed all the grain they will eat in 20 minutes twice a day. Since these yearlings are not accustomed to eating grain, they need to be taught to eat it. Some of them will take to the grain eating more readily than others; therefore, for example, if an allowance of 1/2 pound of grain per head per day is made and only half of them eat grain, this would result in too much grain for those eating it. This dry-lot feeding should be carried on for 3 or 4 days after they arrive in order to get them all familiar with the grain ration. After the third or fourth day on a dry ration, they may be put to pasture and fed 1 pound of cottonseed meal, soybean meal, or linseed meal, plus 1/2 pound of grain per head per day. Some grain on pasture is excellent during the flushing period, which as a rule should be carried on for about 3 weeks before the rams are put in with the ewes.

The farm flock calendar is a sort of boiled-down program of practices to be used during the year, and it should be emphasized that the rams are to be kept separated for the year with the exception of the 6-week mating season.

In conclusion I wish to state that this program has worked very well year after year, I think that the use of a combination of the following fundamental practices is important:

1. Only high-quality yearlings are used.
2. Be sure that no one has already picked out the good ones.
3. An effective culling process based upon the lamb crop that a yearling produces results in an excellent flock when they are 3 years old and older.
4. The yearlings respond to good management immediately by improving in size and giving a profitable wool and lamb crop.
5. The recommended practices encourage the grouping of the lambing season, and this in turn results in the grouping of the management phases, such as cooperative marketing of wool and lambs on a graded basis and at desirable seasons of the year.

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